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A KNAVE AND A FOOL.

A NOVEL.

BY

JESSIE KRIKORIAN,

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A KNAVE AND A FOOL.

CHAPTER I.

"What say you?—
Mine ears are new to such a tale!"

WALROND anxiously hoped that Anthony St Clare would be now terrified into leaving the village for ever. Thinking over it, he could scarcely realise the man's bravado in making the very place from which he

had lately escaped a shameful and horrible captivity, the scene of his attempt to secure a rich wife. And it was this wretch, this felon, who had won Bernice's love? No, a thousand times no! He would not say her *love.* There had been influence at work. Mr Ghauntly, allured by St Clare's reputed wealth, had persuaded his daughter into the engagement; he could not believe that Bernice's free and unfettered choice had fallen on one in every way so far beneath her.

That Marjorie should have become a prey to the young man's *beaux yeux* he could well understand, for he knew his daughter loved flattery, and the mere gratification of outvieing so acknowledged a beauty as Miss Ghauntly would be suffi-

cient to lead her on to commit almost any folly; but this vain child, scarcely a woman even in years, and certainly not one in mind, must not be judged by the same code as Bernice, upon whose fair young face thought had already cast its maturity and its refinement. She, he felt, would be won by no mere flattery, by no vulgar hope of allying herself to wealth, and surely there could have been no affinity between her and Anthony St Clare; strong proof that the young man felt small love for her lay in the fact of his subsequent flirtation with Marjorie. And Walrond now found comfort in the thought that even had fate not played so opportunely into his hands, Bernice would never have been St Clare's wife.

And now, as he sat and sipped his claret, and lit his after-dinner cigar, how rainbow-hued were his musings! The love that had never slumbered, ever viligant and watchful, woke into a sweeter sense of life, and the hope that at first had been but a faint small whisper rose like a Titan and filled his being. This wretched adventurer gone—and the colonel felt that Anthony had now no alternative but flight—might not the devotion, the tenderness that he could offer, meet with its just reward? and with that dear girl by his side— He paused, and a strange shiver of foreboding passed over him; it seemed as though such happiness, possessed by mortal man, must needs make the fates envious. It is when they love that the

brave know fear, that fear, mysterious and subtle, that stands between us and the infinite; that fear which the learned call superstition, and the homely claim as a presentiment.

The servant threw open the door and announced Mr Borrodaile; the little man entered the room, his eyes bent on the ground, and his wan, thin face looking more wan, more thin, than the squire had ever noticed it before.

"You don't look well," said Walrond, pushing a decanter towards him, "take a glass of wine—that's some of the '34 port I know you are rather partial to."

Borrodaile stood and watched the servant close the door, then he came quickly to Walrond's side, and bending down

whispered, "That young man—Anthony St Clare—*is dead!* . . . . I thought at first he was only insensible," continued Stephen, "but after trying for some time to bring him to, a terrible fear seized me, and putting it to the test, I found he was indeed dead. That last blow of yours killed him."

"What shall we do? You, of course, are my witness that he brought it on himself, that I took no unfair advantage of him. He was an escaped convict, trespassing in my grounds with intent to carry away my daughter who is a minor."

"You would hardly make such a defence, colonel," said Borrodaile, with a hard, stringent laugh.

"And why not, pray?"

"In the first place, you attacked him with a whip, which is not lawful; the man resents your treatment, and you dash him down and kill him. Coroners and jurymen, my dear colonel, are not leniently disposed as a rule; they would call that little adventure of yours manslaughter; they might even give it an uglier name."

Walrond started; it would certainly not be a pleasant thing to stand his trial and have to answer for this man's death.

"You deliberately took a whip with you—that they would call premeditation; you certainly meant to assault him," continued Stephen, watching the other, with a light in his narrow crafty eyes.

"But surely they would hardly commit a man of my position for thrashing an impostor, a felon who had escaped from the convict-ship. It is every honest man's duty to hunt down such a creature!"

"Certainly you would have been quite right had you simply hunted him down, as you call it. The convict alive and secured would have proved your zeal for the public good; but the convict dead, and by your hand, is a man murdered, and murder is a crime against the nation, and must be publicly judged."

"It is certainly a most unpleasant business," cried Walrond, rising and pacing the room. "Of course, you are

taking the extreme view of the case, Borrodaile—I have no fear of the results; but the publicity alone will be annoyance enough."

Borrodaile watched him pace the room with heavy regular strides, his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his coat, his brows bent in anxious thought; the lawyer guessed it was no selfish fear that thus darkened his face.

"It is that proud slut he is thinking of," he muttered to himself. "Suppose we keep our own council," he said, slowly; "no one knows anything of the affair but our two selves. What is to prevent our quietly burying the body? I will take upon myself to account satisfactorily for his absence."

"Bury the body?" said Walrond, stopping and facing him.

"Yes, why not; we both dread publicity; I would not have his antecedents exposed, for many reasons."

"Why should I aid you in avoiding publicity?" cried Walrond, with sudden suspicion.

Stephen laughed a low, scornful burst of savage mirth.

"The worst folk could say of me would be that I had introduced a jail-bird into their midst, pretending he was a gentleman; but you—Colonel Walrond, they would call you a *murderer!* They would say you were so carried away by jealousy of this unfortunate young man, that you put him out of the world.

Fancy the sensational catch-penny, 'Shocking murder in high life through jealousy;' fancy haughty Miss Ghauntly in the witness-box."

Walrond bowed his head upon his hands, the rough words cut him to the soul; for Bernice's sake there must be no publicity; for Bernice's sake he must carry this business to the bitter end. He raised his face, haggard and disfigured by a rain of sudden tears.

"By heavens! Borrodaile, you will drive me mad. Gad, sir, in my young days, the horse-whip would have been thought too good for such a scoundrel. Was I to stand meekly by and let him steal my daughter—how should I have punished him?"

"By the law," said the other quietly; "there was no other way."

"Damn your law!" cried Walrond hoarsely.

"The law will damn you," and Borrodaile laughed. "Come, colonel, look the matter fairly in the face. We have only to dig a deep hole, put the body in, and there is an end of the whole affair."

"I killed this man, Borrodaile, you are my witness, in no unfair way; and now you would have me act like any common murderer, and bury the body; no, I cannot, my whole future life would be embittered by the memory of so very unmanly an act."

"Very well," said the lawyer, rising and buttoning his coat. "Of course, if you are bent upon giving the villagers this interesting tragedy in real life, the sooner we make the affair public the better—"

"Stay!" cried Walrond, passing his hand wearily over his brow; "give me time to think—to-morrow you shall have my answer."

"To-morrow will be too late, you must decide now whether you will come with me, and dig the grave, or whether you will give yourself up to justice. I cannot lose my character by any useless delay. The night is dark; shall we go?"

The subtle eviler nature gained the

day, and the two men left the house together. When Walrond returned his hands were soiled, and his brow was damp with the sweat of labour.

CHAPTER II.

"There is a weight upon my soul, like sad presentiment."

PEOPLE began to ask each other questions about Anthony St Clare. He had suddenly disappeared and no one seemed able to say where he had gone. Many wild and improbable reasons for so mysterious an absence were freely circulated, and the squire's name was mixed up more or less in the matter. The Chace servants had been surreptitiously bribed and ques-

tioned, and they bore testimony to many facts that would have astonished both Colonel Walrond and Lawyer Borrodaile; but marvellous as some of these communications were, they none of them even approached the startling events that had really taken place, thus proving the old saying, "Truth is stranger than fiction."

Not even the most imaginative among them was capable of accusing the colonel of murdering Anthony St Clare, and of privately burying the body among the tangled underwood of the old Chace. He looked so little like a melodramatic villain, this portly, moneyed, middle-aged gentleman.

What is there in human nature that finds such delight in a neighbour's undoing

—such licence for gossip, such excuse for wasted time? Let some misfortune happen to A; B, C, and D immediately leave their legitimate work, and stand idly "talking it over." And how few can talk over another's affairs honestly and dispassionately! Even sober-minded people, not given to lying as a rule, will almost unconsciously lend their quota of fiction to the dismal tale; and the ball of scandal grows from a mere mole-hill into a mountain of calumny.

The Walrondites had been proud of their heiress; had seen her grow up among them, a sweet, familiar picture; had been pleased when the stranger chose her; had looked forward to her wedding. And now where was all this generous

feeling gone? Her lover had jilted her had meant to elope with Miss Walrond, and being foiled in the attempt, had gone away, leaving no clue to his whereabouts.

"She needna' a held her head so high!" cried Mrs Stone to a shrill jury of matrons. "No good never did come of bein' that stuck-up."

"It will maybe take her down a peg or two, neighbours," commented the draper's lady.

"She's like never to get married now," sighed Miss Riley; "and all them beautiful gownds as I've made for her marriage! It was her first chance, and most like her last."

"She's falling off a bit," said Nancy

Fuller, a rosy village belle. "She never did have no colour."

And thus they planned our girl's future; and before she was out of her teens, they would have made her a faded old maid —these very people who, a few weeks back, had rejoiced in her beauty, as though, in some mysterious manner, it reflected credit on themselves.

While the village was thus busy with her name, Bernice, in happy unconsciousness, was wondering a little at her lover's absence. There was so much mystery about his sudden disappearance, that, had she loved him her heart would have been filled with anxiety; but as it was, her only feeling was one of hope that, after all, she might never become Anthony's

wife; that he himself had grown tired of the engagement, and that her father would let her stop with him for many years to come; for, try as she would, Bernice could never look forward to leaving the dear, familiar home with any other feeling than dismay.

Though the whole town was talking of Anthony's attempt to elope with Marjorie Walrond, the story had not yet reached Bernice's ears. All she knew of the affair was from Lawyer Borrodaile, who pretended to be astonished at the young man's unceremonious conduct. Borrodaile was careful to suppress all mention of the scene between Colonel Walrond and St Clare; and when people asked him for his version of the scandal, he coolly told them that

they were misinformed, and that there had been no quarrel whatever. And although they did not quite believe him, this flat contradiction, from one who was supposed to have no personal motive in the matter, certainly had its weight in checking the gossips.

It was quite a revelation to Bernice to find how the love she had tried so hard to teach herself for Anthony slipped away from her at the first whisper of freedom; to find herself running singing about the house, filled with unacknowledged, indescribable joy; and that, too, at a time when most women would have been tearful and anxious. She took herself severely to task for this heartlessness. He might have met with some accident; he might

be lying ill; he might even be *dead!* But the girl could find no chord in her own nature that sounded in sympathy with her absent lover.

Was there no such thing as love? she asked herself. Was love—the love that claims a fair, pale host of immortal victims, embalmed in the fantasy of its dead poets—was love but the "sweet sickness" of those poor dreamers whose souls turned from the coarse herbage of mortality to feed upon the honey-dew of imagination? Those mad poets, whose lovers ever stood on the threshold of some awful doom and never reached the common-place content of every-day life, were they but the false teachers of a false faith?

And Bernice sighed; it is hard for the

young to disbelieve in the religion of love. And as she sat thus musing in the fitful firelight how fair she looked, this maiden to whom the world with its schemes and plans and utter selfishness was a sealed book, but who had already gained the great knowledge so many women acquire too late in bitterness and regret, the knowledge that without love no life is complete.

Her quick ears caught the sound of footsteps on the gravel path, and she ran out gaily to meet her father; it was easy to see in that glowing, beautiful face how tenderly and how faithfully Bernice could love.

"Ah! daddy, darling, I am glad you have come," clasping both her hands over

his arm; "three-quarters of an hour late, you naughty, naughty darling."

She took off his coat, and put it on a peg in the hall, then she pushed him into the cosy parlour, where his chair stood ready, close to the fire; she busied herself about him with soft nimble fingers; she untied the woollen wrap from round his lean old throat, and raised his slippers from the fender where they had been comfortably toasting for the last half-hour, and all without seeming to notice the gloom that set like a dark shadow on his uncomely face, for Bernice had become used to finding her father sullen and irritable before dinner; after, he usually thawed a little, even to the extent of a grim joke or two.

But this evening he seemed more silent than usual; as soon as dinner was over, he turned out the lamp, muttering something about wastefulness, and drew his chair close up to the hearth. Bernice expressed no surprise, their evenings were usually spent in darkness; it was in keeping with old Ghauntly's character to deprive himself of ordinary comfort for the sake of saving a few pence; generally she would go to the piano and sing to him, accompanying herself softly, but to-night he seemed so preoccupied, that she feared the music might disturb him, so she sat and mutely watched the firelight play upon his hard, careworn, old face: a very hard old face, without one touch of divinity to soften the heavy lines of greed, of pride, and of meanness.

Such a dwarfed, cramped heart looked out of those cold, faded eyes—a heart that no pity save self-pity could soften, and no love, save self-love, warm; a heart that turned from the gentle being by his side, and would gladly have coined her into stony glittering gold.

Bernice, watching him, saw him suddenly smile, actually smile, at his own thoughts, and the girl's heart rejoiced, like the heart of a faithful dog at the sight of that smile; his musing could not be very sad, she thought. Out from the buried past a memory had come to him, the memory that on his wedding day Bernice's mother had brought him ten thousand pounds—ten thousand pounds, ah! what would he give now for such a sum?

The fire had burned low into a large red

heart, and the girl rose gently and put some more coals on. There was no light in the room now, save on the dim hearth. Out of the darkness Ghauntly called her to his side.

"Bernice, do you remember your mother?"

"Yes, slightly, papa; but I was so little when she died."

"Yes, yes; very young, Bernice; only four years old," and the girl felt a large tear drop on her hand.

"Father!" she cried, impulsively, throwing her arm round him; "I have never missed her care. You have been father and mother both to me—all these long years—"

"Ah! child, I have tried to do my best; but she was a good woman, was your

mother; never a bit of waste in her time; those two in the kitchen have it all their own way now, a gluttonous, extravagant pair!"

Bernice laughed; those two penurious, faithful old servants accused of extravagance and gluttony!

"Ah! papa, darling, you misjudge them; why Barbara saves scraps of soap even against her washing-day; and her cupboards are a perfect storehouse of odds and ends that other people would throw away."

"If my son had lived," continued the old man, not noticing the interruption, "things might have gone better; but I am an old man now, with neither kith nor kin to help me, and—and all the money is

gone" (he fairly sobbed now), "all the money I began life with."

Bernice was used to hear him moan over lost money, and as they never seemed any the poorer, his words troubled her little, but it was the first time she had heard him mention the little baby-brother, whose birth had been their mother's death. Barbara had told her of the pretty baby, who was laid in the same coffin with his fair young mother, but Bernice supposed her father had long ago forgotten him; and now her tender heart ached to think that, hard and cold as he seemed, her father carried about him a deathless mourning for the child. She drew his head down till it rested on her shoulder, and softly patted his thin cheek, mingling her tears with his

—tears the Peri might have garnered in eternity, the holy tears of sympathy.

Little jets of flame sprung out of the dark coals, there was no red heart now, blackness and tiny explosive lights had taken its place; they danced about the room, revelling in the shadows; and one shadow, gigantic and clear, stood out against the bright wall—a shadow of that father and daughter clasped in a mutual embrace—a shadow the flames might have cried to "never again, never again."

Old Ghauntly rose up, patting Bernice's head,—"You are a good girl, a very good girl. I shall miss you sadly when you are married."

It was on the tip of Bernice's tongue to ask some questions about Anthony—had he

written; did he still hold to their engagement—but she checked the impulse. Questions might only anger her father; and if there was anything for her to know, he would soon tell her.

"Good-night, dear," he said, buttoning his coat. He always left her, but this night she sighed to see him go out into the night and the cold, and she ran after him. "What is it?" he said, testily.

"Only to wish you good-night again, daddy," assuming a gaiety she was far from feeling, "and to see if you had got your comforter on."

She stood at the gate watching till the darkness swallowed him up, and then returned slowly to the house.

The parlour was bright enough now. The

servants had lit the lamp as the master's footsteps died away, and they were busy clearing the table. Old Ghauntly would not use the dining-room in the winter, for fear of having to light a second fire.

"You look pale, missy," said Barbara; "won't you go to bed now? Shall I light your candle, honey?"

But Bernice did not feel inclined for bed; on the contrary, she seemed wonderfully fresh and wakeful. So she sat hour after hour thinking—of what?—of a thousand things, events in her young life, words people had said to her, books she had read—sat thus without weariness, while the little gilt clock tolled the patient hours of night. She had met Walrond that afternoon; memory reminded her that he looked

ill, that he seemed preoccupied; memory brought back the very trick of his smile, a strangely kind smile, she decided now. Had he some trouble? mused nineteen, counting over the possible sorrows of forty. And then she vaguely wondered why he did not marry again, some nice widow younger than himself, or even a girl; there were many girls who might grow to love him.

These wandering thoughts must have merged into a dream, for suddenly she became conscious of a sound like a bell. She started up; the early sun was peeping through the shutters, the grate was cold and grey, the lamp still shone steadily, and the little gilt clock pointed to five o'clock.

Yes, there it was again, the sharp, shrill

sound of a bell,—the gate bell! Bernice was no coward, she opened the street door, and ran down the garden path; peeping through the lattice she saw Robert Stacy, her father's head clerk, his white uncovered hair tossed by the cold, sharp wind; she threw open the gate.

"What is the matter?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Oh! miss, miss," he wailed, "come with me, come with me."

CHAPTER III.

"For sure the greatest evil man can know
Bears no proportion to this dread suspense."

BERNICE let the gate slip from her hand, and it banged behind her.

"Papa, papa!" she cried; "has anything happened to papa?"

The old man looked frightened and bewildered. "Come with me," he reiterated. "Come with me."

But the girl, half mad with impatient anxiety, ran past him, her feet scarce

touching the ground; through the empty, silent streets, not stopping till she reached the bank. She never thought of trying to enter by the large public door, but turned instinctively to a small side entrance. Two policemen were standing in the doorway; they were talking earnestly, but both stopped on seeing the girl, bareheaded and flushed, with her hair falling round her face; they recognised her and stood aside. Dr Crofton met her in the passage. "My poor child," he said, "can you bear to see it?"

"Bear to see what?—tell me, is papa ill—*is he* dead?"

"My dear Miss Ghauntly, prepare yourself for the worst,—your father is dead, has been dead some hours."

"Dead!" Bernice said, in a vague, helpless sort of way; "dead! and he only just left me, quite well; how can he be dead?"

"It is very sad, terribly sad!"

"Is papa in there?" said the girl, pointing to the parlour. "Let me go, I must see him." But the old doctor held her hand fast.

"Not yet, my dear young lady, not until you are calmer."

"I am calm now, doctor; let me go."

"It is a dreadful sight, and you must not touch him—you must not go near him."

It was indeed a dreadful sight. In the cold, darkened dreary room in his upright arm-chair Mr Ghauntly sat; his head lay

slightly over on one side; and, through the stillness, a small monotonous drip, drip, fell on the oilcloth with which the room was carpeted. Bernice advanced a step or two; his livid face was in ghastly contrast with a deep red wound on his throat, from which the blood fell drop by drop, with horrible splashes, into a dull dark pool upon the floor.

She recoiled shuddering, covering her face with both her hands.

The doctor led her from the room and locked the door.

"Of course there will be an inquest," he said, handing the key to one of the policemen.

"Suicide, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes; I should think so," he answered,

hurriedly; then, turning to Bernice, he touched her gently on the shoulder, and offered to take her home.

"No, no, thank you," she said; "I shall stop here. I would rather stop here."

"But, my poor child, you can be of no use here. You had better let me take you home."

"No, I will stop here."

"But you cannot go into that room again until the inquest; come home. I can't think what you were fetched for at this hour; better to have told you later. There, take my arm, and let me lead you home."

But Bernice drew her hand away from his friendly touch. She was very pale.

"You are kind, but I would rather not go."

Here a little old woman in a crazy-looking bonnet came forward—the bank housekeeper.

"Will you sit down in the bank, miss, and let me bring you a cup of tea? There ain't no room fit for you to sit in; upstairs is all emptiness and dust, and in the bank there's a fire." Here she began to wipe her eyes on her apron.

"That's right," said the doctor. "You go and get the young lady a cup of tea, and then Mr Stacy will take her home."

Bernice went into the bank, and seated herself on a form that was placed against the wall. At the further end of the

room, over the dismal little fire, her father's two clerks, both old men, were talking together in whispers. How strange it all seemed; the heavy barred door; the wire window-blinds with "Ghauntly & Son" traced on them, the words looking like faded hieroglyphics from the inside. How strange it all seemed, the litter of yesterday not cleared away, and yet that indescribable look about the room, as though it had been shut up for centuries. It was impossible that yesterday, only yesterday—

Bernice buried her face in her hands, and raised it, white and drawn, and tearless; she could not weep, the blessed solace of tears was denied her, she could only sit there in dumb agony, such

agony as had never before touched her young life.

The little old woman, with her crazy bonnet tilted quite over her forehead, thus tilted and suffered to remain as a humble tribute to the horror of that morning, came up to the girl with a cup of tea, but she motioned it away impatiently; the worthy soul stood looking at her, "that scared," as she afterwards confessed, by her white, tearless face.

"Who—who did it?" said Bernice, with an effort.

The little old woman came nearer; bending her head forward, said in a whisper,—

"He did it hisself."

"No, no, no!" wailed the girl, shuddering. It came back to her vividly—the head slightly on one side, showing the deep dark wound, the dull sound as the blood fell drop by drop.

"He must a been mad, poor dear; but he did it hisself. Not a soul could a got in through all them bolts and bars. When I see'd him first—I always called him at five—when I see'd him—"

"Go away," cried Bernice harshly, "go away; your talking makes my head ache, go away!"

The words rang in her ears,—"Did it himself; did it himself." Why?

"Oh, father, father!" she moaned, rocking herself backwards and forwards. "Oh, my father!" she rose and

paced the room many times, and then sat down again; the clerks watched her, offering no consolation. What could they say that she could hear; her grief was too new, too terrible for any earthly consolation. He had left her, alive and sane; and now the tenderest verdict man could give would be that he had done this thing in a fit of madness. He, who had always been so looked up to, so respected. Her father a madman, and a suicide! No, no, it was impossible; some one had stolen in, and basely murdered him; and a flush came to her cheek, and a brightness to her dim eyes, at the thought that justice would hunt down the cowardly murderer.

It was late in the day, and quite a

crowd had collected outside the bank, reading the announcement that had been posted on the door—the announcement that, in consequence of Mr Ghauntly's sudden death, the bank would be closed for a few days. It was market-day, and the town was unusually full; many had come from a long distance meaning to draw out money, and they were naturally angry and impatient at finding the day's business thus at a standstill. Some of these malcontents, after wandering vaguely about, dropped into the Walrond Arms, and tested some of that comfortable hostelry's famous spiced ale; thus fortified, they later on returned in a body to the closed bank, and began to vent their displeasure by throwing stones at the

windows, kicking at the door, and calling out loudly that they wanted their money, and must have it. They were of course soon joined by the town roughs, who were generally ready for any villainy from manslaughter down to cat-chasing.

"Speak to them," said Bernice, as a large stone came crashing through the barred window, and fell at her feet.

But the old men drew back, entreating her to come into the passage.

Cries of "I don't believe he's dead; he's bolted," were distinctly audible. "The old man's insolvent, and that's why he's made away with himself," cried another voice.

Bernice started up, her face aflame.

"Go, you cowards!" she cried. "Open

the door and pay them; papa's memory must not be insulted."

Her hands were on the bolts, but the two men ran forward to stop her.

"For God's sake, Miss Ghauntly, don't open the door; we cannot pay them—"

"Yes you can," said the girl proudly, "I, his heiress, command you to pay them, every penny, every farthing, and never allow them to bank with us again."

The clerks looked at one another.

"We cannot," said Robert Stacy; "even if your permission gave us legal right, which, my dear young lady, could not be until your father's will has been proved; but, even supposing you could give us permission, we have not sufficient funds to pay them. It is quite true what they

are crying out. The bank—this bank I have worked in since a boy—*is insolvent!* We cannot meet a quarter of our liabilities. The governor knew it, and that was why—" he paused, and jerked his head towards the inner-room, that awful inner-room.

Bernice stood like one stunned, like one turned to stone, and suffered them to lead her out of the room, and into the passage where they stood—a terrified little group, listening to the wild shouts of the mob outside. They called him many vile names, him, who sat unable to answer, save that in every drop of blood as it fell was a faint small cry for mercy. The old iron-cased door shook in its staples.

"I will speak to them," cried Bernice, with a sudden light in her haggard face,

"we will not crouch here like rabbits in a hole. Robert Stacy, let me go!" and she flung off the hands that would have stayed her, and in another moment the door was thrown open.

At the sudden appearance of that young girl, a momentary hush came over the sea of human beings before her, and she stood like some avenging angel, her fair face full of holy wrath.

"What are you—men and women," and her voice rang out clear as a bell, "or fiends in human shape, who thus disturb the dead?"

They cowered before her, and some of them slunk away, ashamed of being recognised: but one man said, humbly, but with determination,—

"I have come a long way, miss, and money is wanted at home. I am sorry for your trouble, but I cannot waste another working day. See, here is my bank book. Let me have some of the money I put in. It is all honestly come by, and I want it."

"My good man," said Mr Stacy tremulously; "after the inquest, every one's claims shall be satisfied."

"Hang your inquest!" cried another man, a burly ruffian, who had no money at all in the bank, but who liked a row. "I am going to take my own; come on, mates," and he sprang up the steps, pushing Bernice on one side.

But in another moment a hand caught him by the coat collar, a hand with a grip

of iron, and flung him down into the crowd.

An awed cry arose of "The Squire, the Squire!" and Colonel Walrond turned upon them.

"Whoever follows that man's example shall share his fate. Ah! I know you, Daniel White, the poacher; you shall go to prison for this."

A large body of police, now opportunely arriving, secured several of the mob, and a fierce struggle ensued, which ended in the law obtaining a doubtful victory and marching off with one or two innocent spectators, while the real culprits, trusting to the darkness, took to their heels and disappeared.

Walrond put his arm round Bernice,

and drew her gently into the bank; the late excitement had left her weak and faint, and she rested her head on the Squire's broad shoulder and wept freely and without control, the first tears she had shed that dreadful day.

CHAPTER IV.

"Money can be repaid,
Not kindness such as this."

WO years have passed, two long, sober years, bringing peace to Bernice, the calm peace of resignation. These two years have been passed at Elmsden Abbey, and the pretty little home of her youth is shut up and empty. There is no stain on her father's memory, and the girl's heart glows with gratitude when she thinks of the generosity by which his name was saved.

Every claim upon the bank was fully and honourably discharged, and had it not been for Robert Stacy's inability to keep a secret, Bernice might never have known how the miracle was wrought.

The old clerk brought the news to the Abbey; all was paid, and a balance of five thousand pounds remained.

"Five thousand pounds!" cried Lady Grace, who was present at the interview; "then that is your fortune, my dear," turning to Bernice.

"Then there was ample means," said the girl, with a reproachful look at the old man. "Mr Stacy, how dared you to say that the bank was insolvent? It was your fault that poor, dear papa's remains were so insulted on that terrible day."

"Why did you spread such a disgraceful report, sir?" asked the old lady severely.

"I really thought so at the time," he stammered confusedly.

"Thought so! fiddlesticks!" cried Lady Grace. "Why are you looking so confused? If there is any mystery about the matter, we at least ought to know."

"Well, the fact is, your ladyship, *there is a mystery*, and I have promised not to mention a word about it."

At this blundering confession, Lady Grace looked him full in the face.

"Now, sir, if you don't want me to put the matter in the hands of my solicitors you had better make a thorough confession. This young lady is my

adopted daughter" (here she took the girl's hand and patted it kindly), "and I won't have any underhand dealings where she is concerned. How do we know that there are not many more thousand pounds to be accounted for, and the mystery may mean embezzlement, Mr Stacy. Don't look so indignant; I am an old woman, and I know the world."

"Well, perhaps, if your ladyship looks at it in that light, I may as well tell you that the bank was insolvent. A kind friend of your father's, Miss Ghauntly, out of his own private purse, paid every penny."

"A friend of papa's!" from the girl.

"What is his name?" from the woman.

"Colonel Walrond!" from the man.

They all three stood confronting each other.

"Colonel Walrond!" repeated Bernice, the first to break the silence. "Why should he have done so generous a thing?"

"What were the liabilities?" asked practical Lady Grace.

"Twelve thousand pounds, your ladyship."

"Who ever heard of such an extraordinary man, my dear?—and the five thousand pounds he now sends, makes seventeen thousand pounds; why, Bernie, what can he be thinking of?"

Bernice started. "Does he send me the five thousand pounds, Mr Stacy?—and you actually meant to hide all this from me!"

"Such was the colonel's wish, miss."

"Oh! most generous of men!" she cried, with streaming eyes; "how shall I ever repay so heavy a debt?"

Lady Grace laughed, and then suddenly became grave.

"And but for this unheard-of piece of generosity, my girl might have been a pauper."

Bernice interrupted, "I am a pauper, Lady Grace. I could not accept Colonel Walrond's money. Oh! how I long to thank him. I cannot rest under so heavy an obligation. What can I do? what can a poor weak girl do to repay him?"

"But he wishes to remain your unknown benefactor, Bernice. He must have some motive too, every one has a motive in this

world for their actions; perhaps he owed your father money—who knows!"

When Robert Stacy had left them, Lady Grace turned to Bernice.

"Of course, dear, I was not going to say so before that old idiot, but the reading of the riddle is that Colonel Walrond is in love with you, and if you choose you may be mistress of the Chace."

"In love with me!" she murmured, and from that hour she looked upon Ralph Walrond with different eyes.

She wrote to him asking him to come and see her, and when he stood before her, confused as though he had done her a wrong, she thanked him for his great kindness, so humbly and sweetly, that he

longed to catch her to his heart, and stay that low sad voice with kisses.

She remained firm in her refusal of the five thousand pounds.

"Forgive me for having offered it," cried Walrond, with a red glow on either cheek; "but, but—" he could not finish the sentence, his heart so ached to think of this fair woman penniless.

So time passed on, and Walrond did not presume on the friendship thus costly bought; although cordially pressed, he seldom came to the Abbey; but its *châtelaine* daily sang his praises, and time and gratitude daily taught Bernice to love him with a love that, unrecognised, tinged all her musings; and enshrined in the recesses of her virgin heart he uncon-

sciously engrossed its purest and happiest thoughts.

Lady Grace would have been delighted to hear that Walrond had proposed to Bernice. She spent a great deal of her time wondering why he did not come boldly and woo the girl; of course she would accept him, what woman could be cold to so disinterested a lover; and her ladyship finally decided that Colonel Walrond was needlessly modest. She was not yet tired of Bernice, but she foresaw a day when she might grow weary of playing the adopted mother. It is one thing to have a pleasant young girl stopping with you for a few months, but it is quite another affair to have that pleasant young girl saddled on you for life, especially if

she happens to be penniless. So through these two uneventful circles of time, Lady Grace sings Walrond's praises loud and often, a hymn Bernice certainly never turns weary of accompanying; but he does not propose, and the elder lady is beginning to feel rather impatient.

Marjorie, now grown into a beautiful girl of eighteen, is very weary of the monotony of their quiet life, and she often begs her father to leave Walrond and take her to London. What is the use of having a face fair and fresh as the morning when—

"There are no men to govern in this wood!"

But Walrond dare not leave the Chace; a ghastly fear binds him to the

home of his childhood; the fear that, were he absent, some chance might discover that hidden grave. He has bartered all peace in this concealment; the mental horror of discovery haunts him; and a morbid demon of self-reproach preys upon him, alternatively sullen and vivacious. The mere chance of St Clare's death might not thus have oppressed him; it was that unhallowed burial—though no churchman, Walrond respects its ritual—that nameless, unknown grave that accused and condemned him. There were times when his agitated mind, labouring under this oppressive secret, almost longed to dig up the gruesome corpse, and call upon his fellow-men to see the thing that he had done, and let them hang him unde-

fended: even this grim fate, in its retributive atonement, seemed preferable to the fantastic horrors of remorse, and to the stern, deep, irredeemable darkness that has come upon his soul. But at such times like a cool breeze fanning his weary brow would come the thought of Bernice —Bernice whose eyes seek his, and ask him shy, wordless questions.

CHAPTER V.

"With hopes that but allure, to fly,
With hopes that vanish while she sips;
Like Dead Sea fruits that tempt the eye,
And turn to ashes on the lips."

THERE was a letter addressed to Mrs Hastings; Colonel Walrond, who always opened the post-bag himself, sent it to her at once. The housekeeper was in the store-room attending to the wants of some half-dozen maids; she had a little book in her hand, and every article that left her cupboards was

carefully entered therein, never a better or more economical manager than Mrs Hastings. She put the letter in her pocket, finished her work, and locked the store-room door; from her methodical precision of manner, no one would have imagined the anxiety that consumed her; letters were rare events in her life, but so near allied were her thoughts to tragedy, that she always dreaded to open them.

In the sanctuary of her own room, she opened the note, it ran thus,—

"My dear Mattie,—So long since we have seen you—so long since we have heard any news of you! We are moved, as you will see by the top of this paper; we have now quite grand rooms.

You remember my mentioning a little girl they call Bet? Well, she has now become quite an actress; they give her ten guineas a-week,—only fancy that! and also, wonderful to relate, she does not forget my having helped her a little at first, and nothing will satisfy her but that we must share her home. Come, dear, if only for a short time, as we are getting quite anxious for some news of you."

"I suppose I must go and see them," she muttered, crushing the letter up in her annoyance. "That wretched little outcast indeed! no wonder the stage is despised, when one so low and contemptible as that girl can win fame. Careful study, years of application, all fall before the

merits of a ragged little pauper, whose stock-in-trade is a pleasant voice and a tolerable face. And there are people who would elevate acting to an art! No, no, 'the poor player' at his best is but a mountebank, and a mountebank always liable to be thrust aside by any other who can mouth a little more, or jump a little higher."

She looked round the room, that cosy little chamber that had seen so many varieties of this strange woman's moods, for it was here alone she could cast off the dignified primness befitting Colonel Walrond's housekeeper—here alone she could commune with herself in alternate hope and despair.

"I must go and ask for a holiday.

Please, sir, if so be as it would not be inconveniencing of you—" and she laughed, bitterly, and then her face softened suddenly. "Ah, that the time were come when I dare tell him who I am! out of his loneliness would not the old love revive, for he loved me once more than any other living thing. That girl will never marry him. I should like to be Mrs Walrond of the Chace! it sounds well. Why was I such a fool all those years ago? But then who would have thought that gawky boy, Ralph Carvenue, would ever have bloomed into this handsome, wealthy Colonel Walrond? And—and I was such a pretty woman then, and anything seems possible to a pretty woman when she is young." She crossed over to the mirror and looked long

and earnestly at herself. "Bah! I need not look so dowdy," she cried, impatiently pushing her hair back, and in that simple action a sudden youth and a sudden beauty came into her face. "I will let my hair return to its natural yellow tint, and with a little make up I can hold my own against half the scraggy girls, Miss Ghauntly included," and a glad, triumphant smile settled in her eyes, and irradiated her face.

This smile had altogether faded when she entered Colonel Walrond's study.

"Good morning," said the squire, politely placing a chair for her. "Is there anything I can do for you, madam?"

The housekeeper's eyes travelled round the little room, and then steadied and fixed themselves on Walrond's face.

"I have come to ask you for a short holiday, sir—of course if it will inconvenience you in any way—"

"Not in the slightest," interrupted Walrond heartily. "You have managed my house most satisfactorily, and I shall be happy for you to have a little change." He crossed over to the writing-table, and opened his cheque-book.

"Please accept this little acknowledgment of the able manner in which you have fulfilled your duties here;" handing her the cheque, he seemed to consider their interview at an end, and busied himself in looking over several letters.

The woman stood and watched him; his profile looked sharp and haggard, there were dark circles round his eyes, and the

grey was beginning to show thickly in his once bright hair; an affectionate tenderness came over her face, and she moved a step or two nearer to him.

He turned quickly, he had almost forgotten her presence.

"Yes, yes," he said, absently, "to be sure; and when do you start?" with a sudden look of interest.

"This afternoon, sir, if you are agreeable."

"Certainly, my good lady, certainly."

"I should like to be away a month, sir. I shall make every arrangement to secure your comfort during my absence."

"I hope you will spend a pleasant time," he said, rising and taking up his hat; Mrs Hastings possessed no interest for him, and he wished she would go about her business.

"I am going round to the stables," he continued, "and I will order the brougham for you."

"Oh, thank you, sir, you are very kind, but I would rather walk to the station, I shall take no luggage with me. You see, sir, we working women are not like ladies, we are not obliged to carry a regiment of dresses wherever we go."

Walrond held the study door open for her to precede him, he was always civil to a woman, but as he bent his steps towards the stables, he felt a certain relief to think that the housekeeper would be away for a month; why he could not have told, save that some subtle sympathy between his nature and hers made him vaguely uncomfortable in her presence.

He always avoided her as much as possible; but a fine sense of justice told him that the poor woman did her duty, and that the mere fact of her presence being objectionable to him was no reason for judging her harshly. The cheque which he had lately given her was a sort of unacknowledged compensation for the secret repugnance he felt towards her.

Later in the day Lawyer Borrodaile met Mrs Hastings walking towards the station. He quite started; she looked so little like the Mrs Hastings he had become accustomed to; her face was rosy with artificial colour, her hair was piled up under a coquettish little bonnet, and her whole dress was at total variance with the quiet, subdued taste that usually distinguished her appearance.

"Has anything happened?" he asked, looking at her inquisitively.

"Yes, sir," she laughed, "something has happened, the humble housekeeper goes for a holiday."

"A holiday!"

"Yes, Mr Stephen, a holiday. When one of the maids has her 'Sunday out,' she casts off the livery of servitude, and appears in colours that would put the peony or the tulip to shame, then why should you wonder at seeing me so gay during my brief season of liberty?"

"My good creature," he said, "do not be perverse. Tell me really why you have thought it necessary to change your personal appearance so entirely?"

"Why do you wish to know, Mr Borrodaile?"

"Because, as a friend, I take an interest in all your actions, and because my instinct tells me you are going to do something rash."

She turned her eyes, anxious and full of quick scrutiny, upon him.

"Your instinct, perhaps, tells you right. See," taking the letter from her pocket, "this affectionate epistle is the cause of my change of attire."

Borrodaile read the letter.

"So you are really going up to London," he said, handing it back.

"Well you see, Borrodaile, if I don't humour them a little they may try and find where I have hidden myself. This

letter has been enclosed from a post-office in Liverpool, and failing an answer from me they might go there and ask questions; would it not be better to pay them a dutiful visit?"

"Certainly—and I don't see why you should return—excuse my bluntness, I fear I must have been born with a natural aptitude for treading on other folk's corns, but what atom of good are you doing by masquerading down here?"

"Ah! Borrodaile, don't you see, can't you see, how day by day he grows more sad, more burdened by the lonely life he is leading."

"By that ambiguous 'He' do you mean our friend the colonel?"

"I have watched him, and I am con-

fident he is not happy," she continued. "Mark my words, Borrodaile, that girl has refused him; and when he has thoroughly got over his disappointment, and learnt to view her with indifference, I shall creep to his side, and kneeling, tell him who I am—" she turned towards the lawyer a face full of hope and conviction.

He stood literally spell-bound at the audacious self-confidence of this woman, whom, recognising, Walrond had deep and bitter reasons for hating, while on the other hand, preserving her incognito, was it likely that the proud possessor of the Chace could learn to love this humble and elderly servant?

CHAPTER VI.

" Her lip was silent, scarcely beat her heart,
Her eye alone proclaimed we will not part."

AS time passed on and Walrond still avoided the Abbey, Lady Grace grew angry, and Bernice grew strangely weary and sad. The thought that the squire loved her, opening as it did a possible future in which she might repay his generosity by a willing devotion of her whole life, had supported the girl under a weight of gratitude and a heavy sense of obligation that other-

wise would have crushed her. But now as the thought, reluctantly admitted, that she had accepted charity forced itself into conviction she felt cruelly humiliated.

And was he insensible to the sweet, tender affection that out of her gratitude and her admiration for his noble generosity had blossomed in this maiden's heart? Was he deaf to the low, sweet voice that was so full of melody when she spoke to him? was he blind to the flush upon her fair cheek and the lustre in her large eyes? He was no vain man, but he read her gentle face like a book, and he knew that Bernice loved him, recognising in this knowledge his bitterest punishment; dare he—he with a ghastly secret locked within his lips—dare

he let a wife share his life, and put a watch upon his actions, an ear ever by his side, into which, even in sleep, he might pour a wild confession that would brand him with the mark of Cain! How would she listen to the ever-darkening story of his crime, she who loved in him a being coloured by her own lofty and tender imagination? How would she survive the horror of the shameful death, the hangman's hands about his throat, and a widowhood whose very name was shame?

In the restless irritability that possessed him, he found a certain grim comfort in self-debasement; in his secret reveries he never sought to mitigate or excuse the weakness that had led

him to bury Anthony's body; he found no consolation in the thought that man, judging him, might not have called that unpremeditated death by the ominous name of murder; he chose rather to keep before him always the one stern fact, that by burying the body he had laid himself open to a capital charge.

Thus this morbid nature never spared itself, and was merciless in its solitude. It was from her deep knowledge of human nature that the Church of Rome provided penance for her conscience-stricken sons; not as a punishment for crime, but as a purification from crime's twin-brother, remorse. Had Walrond belonged to that faith, he would have found a grim delight in bodily torture;

his tempest-tossed soul, driven hither and thither, in sight of the fair harbour of peace he dare not enter, would have found relief in any active atonement.

Though Walrond strove to subdue his love for Bernice; though he avoided her, and even by her side so tutored himself that the girl never fancied the joy her very presence caused him; still, those who have ever loved will not wonder that, the more he tried to banish her image from his heart, the more firmly it grew his one happy, though reluctant thought. His soul turned from the fear of discovery, and the terrors of remorse, and found a brief peace in love's tenderness, its radiancy, and its *hope!*

To Bernice's lonely, brooding heart the

mystery and the caprice that thus distinguished Walrond only added to her affection. She studied his every look, his word, his gesture, and thus, thinking of him constantly, this study became the one object of her life. He avoided her, it is true, but a certain intuition whispered that he was not indifferent to her; and yet — how often in her solitary musing did she pause thus?

The torture of this uncertainty was gradually telling on the girl, and there were times when she felt that she must leave the Abbey, and in fresh scenes and amidst new faces strive to forget.

Lady Grace, too, was growing very dissatisfied; the prospect of having Bernice always by her side was beginning to fill her

with dismay. The old lady liked youth and brightness about her, as she liked the fair sweetness of a flower; but visions of Bernice growing old and faded would at times haunt and perplex her.

"What shall I do with her if no husband comes? I can't offer her Justine's place, and I could hardly pension her off, without serious outlay." Lady Grace, thus musing, felt thoroughly worried, and regretted that she had ever asked Bernice to stop with her. "Two years and a-half is certainly a long visit. Colonel Walrond ought to propose; his extraordinary generosity has led us to expect he would do so. She is a pretty creature, taking her all in all, and ought to make a match. A season in town might—but why should I trouble myself

about the girl, she is neither kith nor kin of mine."

Lady Grace, seated by the open window in her cool, dainty boudoir, commenced to fan herself, a decided frown deepening the lines on her wrinkled brow. But the frown fled when a few moments later Bernice entered the room for, unknown to herself, the old woman loved this girl. She came in, clad in white clinging drapery, her soft, noble young face slightly sad, yet eager with a new resolve.

"Dear Lady Grace," she cried, throwing herself down on the floor by the side of her chair; "I have thought it over, and it seems to me the best thing I can do. Dear, kind friend, you will not think me ungrateful, but I am going to leave you. I am going

to try if there is not some work for Bernice Ghauntly—some work by which she can eat bread that is not a gift."

Lady Grace started, and her face flushed; gently taking Bernice's soft young hand in her own tremulous, wrinkled palms she said. "Bread that is a gift, child? may not the old hope to keep youth by them without favour?"

"Do not try to detain me!" Bernice cried, wildly; "my very heart is eating itself away here—as a governess, working for my living, I might forget that I am an orphan and a pauper."

. . . . . .

Lady Grace decided on taking Walrond into her confidence. "If he loves her," argued this anxious match-maker, "the

thought of her going out as a governess will be enough to make him speak out." So she sent the colonel a polite little note begging him to call on her at his earliest convenience.

The Squire presented himself at the Abbey in answer to this urgent appeal. He found Lady Grace quite in a state of excitement, Bernice having just asked if she would recommend her as a governess to a lady whose six daughters required tuition.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing, Colonel Walrond? The silly little thing fancies she ought to do something for her living—of course she has no thought for me, and I should miss her dreadfully; I assure you I look upon her as a daughter, and the idea

of her being a governess is very distasteful to me."

"Poor child," said Walrond, "and has she no relatives?"

"None that she has ever known. Mr Ghauntly, I believe, quarrelled with her mother's people about some money matters, and I don't think Bernice the sort of girl to care to look to distant relations for help. Young women now-a-days are so very independent, and Bernice fancies she would be happier teaching some half-dozen little wretches their alphabet, than she is with me—a pretty return for my kindness in having her here, to turn round on me when I have got used to her. Will you go and talk to her, colonel?—she is in the boudoir practising very industriously, for

fear she may be considered deficient in musical knowledge."

Bernice rose from the piano as Walrond entered the boudoir; it pained him to see how pale and weary her face looked.

"What is this I hear?" he said, striving to speak carelessly; "that you are going to leave us."

Bernice tried to answer with a smile, but it was so clearly forced, and so at variance with her tearful eyes, that the squire's full heart prompted him to take her little hand in his.

"Will you give me your confidence?" he said, kindly. "I may be able to help you, and I should like to feel that you trusted me, Bernice."

Over the bowed face there swept a

lovely wave of colour, dyeing even the white, heavy-fringed eyelids.

"Do you know, child, what this earning your own living means? It is not easy for a woman to battle with the world. Those who do so are made of sterner stuff than you are."

The dark eyes flashed; it was good to see them, so radiantly bright through the lustre of unshed tears.

"You think me so very helpless then? Ah! Colonel Walrond, you have never known how bitter is the bread of charity. Kind and good as Lady Grace is, she cannot take from her gifts the sting of alms. Why can I not work? I should love to do so. Money earned by my own toil would be sweet to me. Surely

there are some little children I could teach—that is not such very laborious work!" with a half-whimsical, half-sad smile.

"And do you think I will let you go," cried Ralph, throwing off in this supreme moment the restraint he had put upon himself. "Do you think, sweetheart, that there is no home you could brighten, no fond, longing, empty heart waiting to shrine you for ever in its love!" He drew her slight, trembling form into his strong arms, raining passionate kisses on the sweet, flushed face. "My love, my wife!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Council! council! A man woos me, father, and would have me marry."

BUT in spite of the Squire's new-found happiness, which, filling his whole being, gave life a newer, sweeter zest, there lurked in his heart a craven fear, the fear of what Marjorie would say! I doubt any widowed father of daughters relishing telling them that he again contemplates matrimony. The young ladies of the present day seem

wonderfully unlike the fair beings of a century or so ago, who remained, if report speaks truly, who remained standing in the august presence of their progenitors; who called their father, sir, and their mother, madam; fancy a sweet little nineteenth century thing in a Newmarket coat curtseying as she enters the maternal drawing-room!

I confess my hero does not shine favourably in the domestic circle, but as an honest chronicler, I am bound to admit that he stood very much in awe of his sharp-tongued little daughter; and especially shame-faced in her presence when he thought of this secret he was keeping from her; but it was an ordeal that must be gone through, sooner or later, for he

could not marry Bernice clandestinely; he could not bring her unexpected to the Chace. No, there must be many preparations for the bonnie bride. Well, he hoped Marjorie would welcome her kindly at least.

Mustering up courage one fine morning, he made his appearance in Marjorie's boudoir; the young lady was gracefully reclining on the sofa reading a continental romance.

"Marjorie," said the colonel huskily; "Marjorie, I wish to speak to you about something important;" he coughed, and seated himself by her side.

Marjorie raised her eyes.

"Well, fire away, dad," and dropped them on her book again.

"But, my dear child, I wish you to give me your whole attention. It is something very important I have to say to you."

Marjorie flung her book down, and sprang to her feet.

"Oh, dad, dad, darling dad, are you going to tell me that at last we can leave this dismal house and go to London."

"Well, perhaps, Marjorie, what I am going to tell you may eventually lead us to London for a few months this summer."

"Oh, you darling!" throwing her arms round his neck; "oh, you old duck—to London. I am happy."

"But you have not yet heard what I am going to tell you—"

"Oh! what can it matter, papa; that we are going to London is enough for me."

"No; of course it will not make much difference to you; you will be marrying one of these days, and in the meantime it will be nice for you to have a companion."

"A companion, papa; please don't get a companion for me. Once we are in London I shall have plenty to do without being bothered by a silly old goose of a companion."

"The lady I intend marrying is no silly old goose, Marjorie; at the most, she is but a year or so your senior."

"The lady you intend marrying!" cried Marjorie, her fair face crimson with

astonishment. "Why, papa, are you gone mad?"

"I hope not, dear;" he spoke jocundly, the secret was a secret no longer, and the worst being over, his spirits rose, and he faced this angry young woman bravely.

"And who is the young lady, papa?" in a voice of suppressed passion.

"Miss Ghauntly, my dear."

Marjorie burst out laughing; long, loud, harsh mirth.

"So you are going to bring her here —as my mother—you!—you! why it is perfectly ridiculous; every one will laugh at you, an old man like you!"

He winced slightly; yes, he was old near that fair young life.

"The woman who blighted my prospects!" cried Marjorie incoherently; "who was the cause of Lord Elmsden breaking off his engagement with me—and then Anthony, who really loved me—"

"Silence," thundered the squire; "never dare mention that scamp in my presence."

Marjorie sank down on the sofa weeping bitterly. "And my mother, my poor dead mother, have you completely forgotten the wife of your youth, you—you bad old man?"

"I may be a bad old man, Madgie, but it is scarcely respectful your telling me so; and as for the wife of my youth she was not worth remembering, the greatest kindness towards her memory would be forgetfulness."

"Oh! that I should have lived to see this day!" cried Marjorie tragically. "My poor dear mother's name insulted; the very dead trampled on in this mad infatuation—that horrid girl, that horrid, ugly, white-faced thing!" and she ran out of the room banging the door behind her; leaving Walrond in the pretty satin-lined boudoir, a prey to alternate mirth and annoyance.

Marjorie must tell some one. She felt as though her very heart would break did she not speedily vent the passion that consumed her by startling some one with this wonderful news. Her usual confidante, Antoinette, she had sent to the village to match some silk, so she put on her hat with a view to meeting that young person and obtaiuing her sympathy. Walking

under those cool, shady old trees, she fancied herself the most unfortunate girl in existence, and mentally decided that, rather than be civil to the new Mrs Walrond, she would run away from home and go on the stage. All the damsels she had ever read of who sought the stage, had been received with open arms, and had ended by becoming stars of the first magnitude, commanding fabulous sums from anxious, obsequious managers, while princes and earls hung enamoured on their smiles.

Yes, the stage would just suit her, and the prospect was certainly soothing, to say the least of it. She had just arrived at this comforting conclusion when she saw Mr Borrodaile walking slowly

towards the Chace; she ran up to him, crying, "What do you think?" and then paused, completely out of breath.

Now, if a plump, pretty young lady were to run up to you in a lonely lane, breaking in upon some obtuse reverie, and crying breathlessly, "What do you think?" you would most likely stand for some seconds, blinking at her in a state of mental confusion not easy to describe; kindly put yourself in Borrodaile's place. "What do you think?" conveyed no rational idea to his usually acute brain; so he stood blinking at her.

"Only fancy!" she at length ejaculated.

"What am I to think? what am I to fancy?" he said, with the gentle patience of a man towards a spoilt child.

"Oh, Mr Borrodaile! papa is going to be married again."

"The devil he is!" said the lawyer, with a sudden frown.

"Yes, and to that odious Miss Ghauntly."

Borrodaile began poking the gravel pathway with his stick. It was easy to see he was annoyed, deeply, intensely, horribly annoyed.

"What am I to do? Oh, Mr Borrodaile, you are so kind, you are so clever, cannot you suggest some means by which this disgraceful marriage may be prevented?"

"I cannot," he said, slowly. "I cannot see how we are to prevent it."

"I am no one to papa now; and he even told me that the greatest kindness he could

do poor dear mamma's memory would be to totally forget her."

Borrodaile laughed.

"Why did you laugh, sir?" cried Marjorie hotly. "I thought you would sympathise. I did not tell you my troubles to provoke your mirth."

"I was laughing at the thought of so old a man as your father marrying a young girl like Miss Ghauntly."

"I don't think she is so very young, she looks quite thirty; but what papa can see in her, I am sure I don't know."

"Nor anyone else," said Borrodaile dryly, and with a fine sneer.

"Of course," continued Marjorie, "I shall not live in the same house, to have that woman domineering over me; it is not to

be expected. I shall tell papa he must make me an allowance, and let me live where I like. I have ten thousand pounds of my own, that Uncle Harry left me. He was not my real uncle, you know; he was the husband of the lady who took care of me while papa was in India, and I do wish he had never come home, I am sure I do."

"Marjorie," said Borrodaile, and his little, sharp face softened wonderfully; "at such a time as this, may I offer you the devotion of a lifetime? May I hope that you would grow to like me just a little?"

Marjorie looked up at him in astonishment; her whole mind had been so full of this sudden, unexpected trouble, that for a moment his proposal bewildered her—only for a moment, though. Marry

and leave home, show her independence thus!—and she smiled up at Borrodaile—a smile full of arch encouragement.

"My darling," he continued; and that word of tenderness so new to him lingered on his lips. "I will take you to Paris—to London—anywhere you like. I have plenty of money, Marjorie, and you shall live like a queen."

A miser by nature, Borrodaile's little cramped heart opened; and at that moment he would have lavished all the hoarded wealth it had taken so many years to accumulate, on this winsome little maiden.

How fair she looked—the deep blue eyes, the softly-tinted hair, the pure, bright, dimpled face. Borrodaile, emboldened, bent

down and kissed her, and Marjorie, in permitting that first shy kiss, tacitly accepted him.

He had scarcely known till now how much he loved her; it had crept upon him secretly, encouraged by her gay careless manner; and now his heart thrilled to think that she would be his wife. She was so pretty, she was so little; unlike most small men Borrodaile did not admire tall women; he hated to feel at a disadvantage, his vanity must look down at a woman, and so powerful was that vanity that I really think, had he possessed the power, he would have made all the world small, rather than have altered his own misshapen little person.

. . . . . .

"Nonsense!" cried the Squire, when

Marjorie, with great dignity, announced her intention of marrying Borrodaile. "I will not permit it—a little cad like that! No, Marjorie, we must find a bridegroom more worthy of you."

"Papa, I must remind you that you have forfeited all further control over my actions," and the little lady drew herself up with a look of withering contempt. "We have both chosen our own path; you persist in a marriage which I thoroughly disapprove, and I have no alternative but to make a home for myself. Remember, papa, you drive me from the Chace."

"I must speak to Borrodaile," cried Walrond wrathfully. "The presumption of the fellow! I shall send him about his business if—" and Walrond paused in

sudden confusion; swift and sure the poisoned arrow entered his proud heart. Could he send Borrodaile away? Were they not accomplices linked together by the chain of a mutual crime?

CHAPTER VIII.

"Oh, let me not be mad sweet Heaven!
Keep me in temper, I would not be mad."

THE Walrondites had plenty to talk about. The Squire marry Miss Ghauntly! That was natural enough, they decided, he being a fine man, and lonely, no doubt, and she having neither kith nor kin to care for her, poor young thing! But that Marjorie Walrond should marry Lawyer Borrodaile seemed quite another affair, and the busybodies shook their heads ominously over this ill-assorted union.

It afforded the maidens good sport too, speculating on how the lawyer managed his wooing. He seemed such a little, hard man, old too before his time, and anything romantic or lover like proceeding from his stern mouth seemed impossible. These giddy young things forgot that Cupid possesses the power of making even the dumb eloquent; and Borrodaile under his influence certainly blossomed into a most abject and devoted slave; Marjorie's power over him seemed absolute, and, being fond of tyranny, she managed to pass the short term of her betrothal in a very satisfied state of mind. She did not love him, and yet the poor silly child fancied it possible to be happy in his society without that

tender mysterious influence which alone can make a life-long union bearable.

No; she did not love him; she laughed at him, despising him not a little for the blind devotion of his affection for herself, for all his odd little bachelor ways and habits, and more still for the physical deformity of which he showed himself so conscious; and yet, as day by day drew them nearer towards marriage, Marjorie never thought of drawing back.

In vain the colonel entreated her not thus to barter her life's happiness; all the obstinacy of her nature rose against his arguments.

"Remember, my child, marriage is no holiday engagement; it is a stern reality that must last for life. Wait, Marjorie,

for a couple of years, and then see if you can still anticipate any happiness as Stephen Borrodaile's wife. If, after such a trial, you still decide on marrying him—"

"You will give your consent, papa? Very kind, I am sure; but I am not going to put myself in Miss Ghauntly's power. If there is any woman I hate, and have always hated, it is that conceited, intolerable young person!"

Walrond spoke to Borrodaile.

"My daughter is so very young, she hardly knows her own mind. You surely will not hold her to this sudden engagement?"

"I beg to differ from you, my dear sir;" and the lawyer smiled consciously.

"I am convinced your charming daughter knows her own mind thoroughly; and as she has done me the honour of promising to become Mrs Borrodaile, I certainly shall not be the one to draw back from the affair."

Walrond's brow reddened. This fellow, once servile and cringing, had now no motive to curb the calm insolence that at all times was to him a sweet privilege.

"I shall not pay Miss Walrond's legacy!" he cried, hotly.

"Just as you please," said the smaller man with irritating good nature. He was not marrying Marjorie for her ten thousand pounds; he could wait for that. When his wife attained her majority her father

would have no further control over her fortune.

So their wedding-day drew nearer and nearer, and at length arrived. Oh, the sweet bride in her virgin dress!—oh, the lovely, rosy, shy face that looked upon life that morning through a costly bridal veil! Was there no foreboding of the dim future lurking in that careless, defiant little soul?

The Squire's heart ached as he gave her away; his contempt for his son-in-law was irrevocable and profound. At the solemn words, "Who giveth this woman away?" a shiver ran through his stalwart frame, leaving an icy chill. It seemed as though his conscience asked that question, sitting in grim judgment on the sin

that had made such a marriage possible for his daughter. Had there been no secret between Borrodaile and himself, a father's authority must have forbidden this unhallowed union. The weasy old rector's voice was lost in the thunders of self-condemnation, and his answer was faltering and confused.

It was soon over. It is but a few words, the giving and taking of a slender golden circlet; and yet from that hour two human beings are bound together till death or dishonour shall part them!

Well, Marjorie Borrodaile is gone—gone with all youth's wild anticipation of and delight in change—the dull routine of her maiden home cast off for ever. But, Marjorie, there are no trials worse than sameness?

Perhaps not for youth, standing on the threshold, eager and stout-hearted for the battle of life. Many a one has cried, looking afar, with bright bold eyes,—"Give me anything—trouble, sorrow, care—anything but this peaceful inaction, this calm weariness!"

. . . . . .

Bernice's marriage followed speedily; a cold, dark, damp morning.

"Happy is the bride the sun shines on," said Bernice, with a merry laugh. "Look, dear Lady Grace!"

And Lady Grace looking at that joyous lovely face, forgot to notice how dismally the rain beat upon the skeleton trees.

"Ah, my child," she said, tenderly,

"the sun is in your heart, and may it always shine there."

But it might have poured those proverbial cats and dogs, that devoted village cared not, they were there to a man, to see their Squire's marriage. Those who could not get into the church stood outside, and the merry rain danced dismal jigs on their umbrellas, or played at miniature waterfalls down their patient noses. They never thought of grumbling, such is that curious indifference to comfort which possesses a body of people come out sight-seeing. They were rewarded by a glimpse of Walrond's happy face, and a vague vision of silk and lace and flowers as he handed his fair bride into her carriage.

Now it happened that Mrs Hastings, returning this morning from London (perfectly unconscious of the wonderful event that was at the moment taking place in the old village church), finding it so wet and dismal, thoroughly regretted not having written announcing her intention of returning to the Chace; had she done so, she doubted not that a carriage would have been sent to meet her; as it was, she could not even procure a fly, arrivals at Walrond being few and far between, no cabman was found brave enough to take up his monotonous stand outside the little station. Mrs Hastings fed her imagination, during that uncomfortable walk across the wet fields, with anticipation of Walrond's delight

at seeing her back again, for this woman firmly believed that the Squire was not indifferent to her; he had loved her once, and a woman is seldom convinced that she cannot regain possession of an ancient flame.

On arriving at the Chace, her astonishment was unbounded on seeing scaffolding erected outside the house, for Walrond was having the place put into thorough repair in honour of his wedding; to-day there were no workmen there, the whole village having taken a holiday. Mrs Hastings stood ringing the door-bell for quite a quarter of an hour before she received an answer; cook having provided a sumptuous luncheon for the servants, which, aided by several dozen

of costly champagne, kindly contributed by Mr Charles, the butler, was being duly enjoyed by the beauties and gallants of the kitchen, none of whom felt any curiosity to know who was ringing the front door-bell. At last, in answer to a vigorous peal, a young housemaid opened the door; she was dressed in most extravagant fashion.

"Jane! what is the meaning of this?" cried the housekeeper angrily.

Jane, who felt that that person's sway was over, answered saucily,—

"Nothink; only we is all enjoying of ourselves, as it is master's wedding-day."

"Master's wedding-day!" she cried, through white, drawn lips.

"Yes, don't you know? Well, I never!

and he be a-married to young Miss Ghauntly, her as lives along o' Lady Grace Elmsden."

"My God!" cried the housekeeper, staggering blindly forward.

The girl caught her. "La, mum!" she cried, supporting her; "you need not take on so; maybe the young madam will want you to manage for her; and if not, there be plenty o' places, better nor this yer too!" with a toss of her head; it was plain Jane had quite the modern serving-wench's idea of independence.

"Go, child," said the housekeeper, sinking into one of the hall chairs; "go, tell them at the stables to send round the brougham for me, I must go to the Abbey."

"The coachman and John be gone with master in the carriage."

"Never mind, anything will do for me; the dog-cart. Yes, tell one of the grooms to bring round the dog-cart."

"Law! who do you think it is?" cried Miss Jane, running back to the kitchen; "nothink more nor less than that old Hastings. And an awful way she be in just along o' master's marriage. She wants one of you fellows to bring round the dog-cart, 'cause she's a-going to the wedding."

"What for?" asked cook.

"Why, to kick up a row, I should say from the looks of her. Jim, you go and get the carriage for the lady."

"Not I," said Jim sturdily. "I aint a-going to lose my place for no old Hastings. Don't none o' you fellows go;

take my word for it, maister don't want her a-galawanting up at the Abbey."

"Run up again, dear, and say as none o' the stable men is here," said cook; "say these is all gone to the wedding."

"Won't you have summat to eat, mamn?" said Jane, pitying the haggard-faced housekeeper.

"No, no," she cried, rising hurriedly; "I must go to the inn and get a fly," and before the maid could say another word, she had caught up her umbrella, and walking quickly down the approach, was soon out of sight.

"Well, I never!" commented Miss Jane; further speech failed her, and she shut the house door.

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What an age it seemed to the impatient, excited woman while they harnessed the bony old mare into the shabby, dilapidated fly; and the two miles drive—did ever horse go so slowly? She sat back, crouching in a corner of the carriage, her hands locked, her wild eager eyes full of fierce fire.

"Married! married! married!" was the burden of her cry. "Ah! why did I leave him? What mocking devil, drawing me to ruin, blinded my eyes to such a catastrophe as this! Oh, Ralph, lover of my youth! Oh! dead days! It is now that I know that I am old—but I will have my revenge," and a ghastly smile convulsed her ashen face. "I will crush that proud young queen; she shall never share his life; never, never!"

She started from this reverie as the cab drew up at the Abbey lodge; all down the approach were carriages waiting to take the guests away from the wedding breakfast, they made room for the shabby old cab, and Mrs Hastings, alighting, asked for Colonel Walrond, saying she had something of importance to tell him.

The stately, powdered Adonis returned—

"Colonel Walrond will see you shortly; step in here, mamn."

"I cannot wait!" cried the housekeeper excitedly. "Ask him to come at once, it is a matter of vital importance." She entered the anteroom, and paced the floor like a caged lioness.

Walrond rose from the marriage feast, and excused himself; no one but Bernice

noticed how pale he was; this urgent message from his housekeeper! Had they by some chance dug up that lonely grave? Had the storm exposed his handiwork to the gaze of an avenging Heaven? Thus does conscience make cowards. He stood with his hand on the door-handle for some seconds before he could summon up courage to enter the room where Mrs Hastings was.

She turned quickly at the sight of him.

"What!" she cried. "Am I too late? —are you indeed married?"

He looked at her.

"Do you not know me?" she said, softly; "has no subtle instinct warned you who I am? Have you indeed forgotten Mattie Selvester?"

"Mattie Selvester!" shrieked the Squire. "Why do you speak of Mattie Selvester?"

"I am Mattie Selvester."

"You lie!" cried Walrond, seizing her wrist, and drawing her to the window. "That wanton died—has been dead many years."

"The woman who died in the Manchester workhouse, and was buried in my name, had been my maid. Her wearing some linen marked with my name led to the mistake." She pushed back her veil, and looked up at him. "Do you not recognise me, Ralph?"

"You—you Mattie!" and he laughed. "No, I do not recognise you."

"You do, Ralph Carvenue; your eyes

tell me you do. I am Mattie—*I am your wife!*"

"My God!" he groaned. "If she speaks the truth!" He recovered himself quickly. "Even if you are that wretched woman, where are your proofs? I refuse to recognise you."

"Mr Borrodaile knew who I was from the first."

"Borrodaile knew? Borrodaile aided you in this deception? Why did you not tell me this sooner? why did you wait till now?"

She bent her head; a colour suffused her face, soft and tender as a maiden's blush.

"Because I hoped, under a humble disguise to win back your love, Ralph, and obtain forgiveness for the past."

Walrond buried his face in his hands.

"My poor, poor darling!" he groaned. "Oh, how shall I soften this blow?—how shall I atone for the wrong I have unconsciously done you?"

"You have committed bigamy," said the woman, with an attempt at playful tenderness, "but I will not prosecute you, Ralph."

He turned on her.

"Away! out of my presence, hag, lest I forget your sex, and do you some deadly injury! Away, false wife—wretched wanton! The law shall free me from this odious tie. Away—away I say, or the servants shall thrust you forth!"

She shrank from him; his blazing eye

and uplifted hand appalled her; and she fled from the house, through the lines of carriages, hugging to her heart the thought that she had indeed meted a terrible vengeance.

CHAPTER IX.

"Comfort her, comfort her, all things good!
Let me and my passionate love go by;
But speak to her all things holy and high,
Whatever may happen to me."

ERNICE has changed her fair white bridal dress for the pretty costume of brown velvet which she is to travel in. Her bridesmaids are standing round her, a group of merry, chattering girls, when Lady Grace enters the room.

"Ah! my child, you are ready, I see. Nothing a man likes so well as a wife who

can dress quickly and neatly." She drew her on one side, and pushing a dainty little purse into her hand, whispered,—"Take this gift from your mother, Bernice; there are many little things you may care to buy in Paris, and not perhaps like to ask monsieur for the money."

"Thank you, dear Lady Grace!" cried the girl, throwing her arms round her kind old friend. "How good you are to me! and—and—" She fairly burst into tears.

"Come, come, this won't do!" and Lady Grace patted the smooth, bowed head. "You will make that poor man thoroughly miserable—you and the weather."

Walrond is standing in the hall. How glad he will be when it is all over—when he can get away from these kindly officious

people, who are all wishing him happiness. Happiness! Where in all the wide world can there ever more be happiness for him, he thinks. By the aid of an iron will he has crushed back the tempest in his soul, he has smoothed his pallid face, he has tutored his lips to smile, and his voice to answer without betraying him.

How fair Bernice looks; her face, tender and flushed, is half shaded by the drooping plumes that circle round her hat. The Squire draws her hand through his arm, the guests stand aside, and thus he leads her away. Bang goes the carriage door, the horses rear and plunge in the wet gravel, and they are gone amidst a shower of rice and badly-aimed old shoes.

Walrond felt that he must tell Bernice

all; tell this girl, so young and fair, so flushed with bridal honours, so full of love and faith, tell her that she is not his wife! He could not tell her—he must have time, he must soften the story; his brain seemed benumbed, and incapable of invention or prevarication. The terrible truth—

"You are not my wife," rose hideous and bare to his lips, and he shuddered.

She put her hand through his arm, and he, unconscious of this first shy tenderness, suddenly started forward and told the coachman to drive to the Chace. Yes, he could tell his tale there, it would be better than waiting till they reached London. What would she do? what would she say? he became so wrapped in an agony of conjecture, that he forgot Bernice was by his

side, forgot even where he was, until the carriage stopping suddenly roused him.

"Bernice, I have something to tell you; will you come into the house with me?" and the girl followed him with ready obedience; he opened the door with a latch key and led her into his own little room; that little room, that had always seemed to have a welcome for him, looked forlorn and dreary now; the fire had burnt out, and the room was cheerless and dark. Walrond lit a lamp, but its rays, struggling with the grey remnants of day, scarcely dissipated the dismal gloom.

"Welcome home, Bernice!" he said, with harsh irony; he took her soft white face, framing it in both his hands, and

looking into her eyes, continued in a tone of rough pathos :—" I think, child, there are indeed devils that play with man, and consider with fiendish cunning when and how they can best strike some unexpected blow. This day, our wedding-day!" and he laughed in grim derision. "Come my bride, put your lips to mine, and tell me that we did indeed this very morning take solemn vows of love and constancy. And shall that vile outcast, steeped maybe in vice and infamy, have the power to cast those vows to the winds. Ah, no!" and his voice shook with bitter tears.

Bernice shrank back from him; a fear came upon her, sudden and terrible, the fear that she had married a madman.

"Ah, my darling! I have frightened

you," he said, with new tenderness. "Bear with me a little, Bernice. Sit down here by my side, and let me tell my story straight from the beginning. O God! that an act of clemency should have recoiled upon my own head thus! That woman! I could not forget that she was the mother of my child, and I shrank from proving her sin. How shall I begin? shall I tell you of a young fool reading with an army tutor in a dull, little, provincial town, who fancied he had won a prize when a third-rate actress, after much pressing, consented to become his wife. Shall I tell you how that same young fool was gazetted into a marching regiment, and suddenly ordered to India, and the luggage he took with him included a wife and child. Ah, Bernice!

that young fool was not rich; he had had expectations, but the relative who had raised them disinherited him, and poverty was not exactly what that third-rate actress had counted on when she married him.

"Well, to make the story brief, she grew discontented, and wished to go back to her old stage life, and one day she left husband and child, without the ceremony of any leave-taking. That she was not alone, her husband was convinced. But he was poor, and in those days a divorce was a costly luxury. He was also proud, and shrank from making his folly and his misfortune the subject of a newspaper article. The scandal might eventually injure his child, he reflected; and, besides, this young fool —more a fool in his wisdom than he had

previously been in his folly—was firmly convinced *then* that he would never again wish to marry.

"So the years passed on, and time brought him forgetfulness and content; and one day he received a letter from the matron of a Liverpool hospital, who stated that a woman had died under her charge, whose last words had been his name and address. Nothing was found to identify the woman, save the initials 'M. C.' on some article of apparel. You know, Bernice, that my real name is Carvenue, and that I assumed the name of Walrond when I became owner of the Chace. On hearing that the dead woman's clothes were marked 'M. C.,' I concluded that my wretched wife, Matilde Carvenue, was dead. I went to

the hospital, I questioned the matron, and from her description of the deceased, I became convinced that I was indeed a widower."

"Is this your own story?" said Bernice. "Your first wife ran away from you—how could she be so cruel?—and died in an hospital."

"Ah, child!" he cried, in a voice of anguish, "have I not prepared you? Can you not see to what end leads this story? My story! Why should I ever have troubled to tell you my story, without an object in view?"

Bernice's earnest look convinced him that the subtle meaning of his words had indeed escaped her innocent, unsuspicious mind.

"Ah, my darling!" he cried, catching her in his arms, and looking into her face, with all his storm-tossed soul in his eyes. "Ah, my darling! God forgive me for the false sophistry that prevented my severing that guilty woman from my life! She lives, Bernice—the long-forgotten wife of my youth! And to-day, while we were merry at our bridal feast, she sought me, and urged her prior claims. She—ah, my darling, speak to me! Curse me if you will, but speak to me!"

She freed herself from his arms. Her white face looked strange to him, so altered, so drawn.

"And I—what am I?"

"You—my darling, my love, my life! I can easily get a divorce. That woman

has kept herself hidden from me for sixteen years; surely I might be pardoned for thinking her dead, had I not thought I had certain proofs."

"But," persisted Bernice, "in the eyes of the law our marriage was a farce; I am still Miss Ghauntly in spite of this;" and she touched her wedding-ring.

He did not answer; he felt choked.

"Still Miss Ghauntly; not your wife—not your wife, Ralph!"

"Not my wife, Bernice, but, please God! you soon will be. I shall consult some eminent London solicitor. And in the meantime, my poor child, what will you do? Had you not better go back to Lady Grace until I can claim you?"

The girl turned towards him, her dark

eyes flashing. Go back to Lady Grace! How easily he said it! She felt she would die first. Go back to the home she had just left in triumph, thus cast down, thus humiliated!

She left his side, and crossing the room, stood by the cold grey grate. How terribly alone she felt! Not one relation in the whole wide world—married that morning, and yet no wife!

He stood looking at the solitary young figure, at the pained fair face — looking with eyes that grew dim in pity and yearning tenderness.

"Oh! why did I not recognise the she-devil, and drive her forth?" he cried, in a sudden frenzy of impotent wrath. "How could that woman have lived here

so long, disguised as my housekeeper, and I not recognise her?"

"Mrs Hastings your wife!" cried Bernice. She had pictured some mysterious being, vague and misty. Thus to be brought face to face, as it were, with the woman who claimed her name added a new pang. "If you have deceived me, Ralph, may God forgive you!" she said, solemnly. Even Bernice's innocent heart was learning suspicion.

"So young and so pitiless, Bernice!" he said, sadly. "Ah, well, hate me, sweetheart, if it will help this bitter business. God knows, I would give my life to right you! But what will you do, dearest? Shall I take you to London, and find you some nice, quiet lodgings until I can

marry you again? You would not care to return to the Abbey. If we go to London, we must start soon; the last train leaves in about half-an-hour."

"I can think better alone," said the girl. "Leave me for a few minutes." And she passed her hand wearily over her face.

Without a word Walrond left the room. Wandering over the empty house, he entered the large dreary drawing-room, where the shrouded furniture looked ghostly in the half-light, and a dozen mirrors reflected his tall restless form; and thus, in solitary bitterness, his wedding-day drew to a close.

He looked at his watch—twenty minutes were gone; it would take ten at least to

reach the station if they wished to catch the last train.

The study was empty; a folded paper lay against the lamp. He seized and opened it, with hands that trembled with a new fear.

"I am going to London alone. I have money. In pity do not try to find me until you have obtained a divorce.

"BERNICE."

CHAPTER X.

"She was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts."

IT is not a pleasant thing for an elderly, shy man facing for the first time in his life a rigid cross-examination in facts and motives long since forgotten.

The eminent solicitor whom Walrond consulted concerning his case, sat in his smoky little office, calm, inquisitive, and almost silent, while our poor Ralph grew flushed and hot, blundering through his

case, and growing more and more confused as to detail. At last the great man condescended to speak.

"You are sure the woman who claims to be your wife is the woman you married?"

On that head the squire was positive.

"And at the time you placed a tombstone over the grave of the person who died in the Liverpool hospital, you fully thought you were marking the exact spot where your wife lay buried?"

"Most certainly!" Walrond cried.

"The evidence of the matron, if obtainable, would greatly assist us." The attorney drew a sheet of paper towards him, and made a note to that effect.

"Your wife, you say, had been an actress

—are you positive that, when leaving you, she was actuated by any criminal motives?"

Colonel Walrond could not say positively, but rumour had coupled his wife's name with a young civilian, a certain Geoffrey Golden; and this young man had left Calcutta at the same time as Mrs Walrond.

"Your case is very weak, my dear sir; and the only ground we can go on is this lengthy and extraordinary desertion. I am afraid, under such circumstances, you will not get a divorce, and I must obtain counsel's opinion before filing your petition."

Walrond started up, and paced the narrow room. How detestably calm and comfortable the lawyer looked, a bilious-skinned man, with fat, hanging cheeks,

and little shrewd, twinkling eyes; a fine contrast to our badgered squire!

"Of course, Colonel Walrond, we might advertise for this Geoffrey Golding, and having obtained present knowledge of the man, we might proceed to look up his early career, and thus come upon some proof of your wife's presumed misconduct."

Walrond's face brightened, and he sat down again.

"The very thing!" he cried.

"But," continued the cautious lawyer, "even having obtained positive proof may avail you nothing. I am not sure that the length of time that has elapsed between your wife's elopement and your present petition may not be ruled by the court as connivance in the first instance, and collu-

sion subsequently; and in the latter case, your second bigamous marriage might tell against you fatally. I do not quite like the fact of your wife having lived under the same roof as yourself for the last two years; that also puts another complexion on the case. Excuse me, my dear sir, but it sounds like an improbable story."

"I cannot see the improbability," cried Ralph, impatiently. "I thought the woman was dead; I forgot all about her. It was not likely that I should look closely at my housekeeper, who seemed a decent old person enough, and certainly never in any way reminded me of the girl I married eighteen years ago."

"And yet, when she confessed her identity, you immediately recognised her?"

"Yes, when she spoke to me in the old manner, I recognised her."

"And you could swear to her identity?"

"Most certainly I could."

Walrond left the lawyer's office, with a confused and uncomfortable sense of his own shortcomings. Of course, any sensible man would have had his wife traced the moment he discovered her elopement, and Walrond, agreeing to this, began to despise himself as a drivelling idiot; and thus, solitary and dissatisfied, he wandered through the crowded streets of London. The time that must elapse before he could hope to know his fate must needs hang heavily on the hands of a man like this simple soldier, without intellectual resource, and unused to bodily idleness. Some faint

consolation he derived, it is true, from the thought that Bernice was also in London, breathing the same air as himself, walking, maybe, the selfsame pavement, listening to the same everlasting roar of wheels, and yet these two, whose hearts beat in unison, were as thoroughly parted as though seas rolled between them. The colonel, not given to romantic dreaming, soon grew weary of this unsubstantial cause for satisfaction, and became practical and anxious.

She might be ill, sorrowing, or in want, and he, with thousands at his command, was unable to aid or succour her. He, with no occupation for his robust strength, was haunted by the thought of this slender girl striving to earn her living by the poor toils open to penurious womanhood. That

she had money enough for the many needs of civilised life he doubted, and the doubt alone was torture. When she fled from him, she had no doubt, in her inexperience, thought a divorce as easily obtained as sued for; even he, with his fuller knowledge of life, had been unprepared for the slow working of that ponderous machine, *The Law.*

He pictured her, anxiously perusing the daily papers for some tidings of his divorce, and he inserted many a reassuring paragraph in their agony columns, trusting the vague words would meet her eye, and comfort her; but to none of these did he receive any answer, although he went so far, on several occasions, as to head these ambiguous advertisements by the loved

name, Bernice. He often besought her to apply to such and such a firm of solicitors if in need of ready money; but he, who loved her, knew her pride, and he feared that she would starve rather than apply to him for relief. Had he possessed some means of knowing that she was protected and comfortable, he felt that he could have waited patiently until he could claim her, his poor, outraged darling! His vigorous mind refused to morbidly meet trouble half-way, and he seldom doubted the success of his petition.

The noise of the city burdened him; never had the Chace seemed more home-like than now, when alone in London, and without occupation, he recalled its many resources of stable and kennel. He

missed his hounds' honest welcome; the shining, healthy faces that, grinning, wished him good-morning when he visited the cosy boxes where the horses turned large, soft eyes full of mute greeting. Even old Thornley's grumbling would have seemed a relief. In short, the Squire was home-sick, and when this dismal feeling was strongest upon him, he would mount his hired hack and trot him round and round the park, with the sharp sleet driving in his face, and long for an "awkward double."

At last he took a return ticket to Walrond, meaning to sleep a night at the Chace, and return to London the next day. He found the house full of company, for Mrs Borrodaile, on her return from Paris, had considered her husband's home much too small

and mean for her occupation, so she took up her residence at Walrond Chace, and flashed in and out among the astonished natives, a perfect triumph of millinery; causing the sober-minded astonishment, and the ambitious many an envious pang.

Stephen had pretended to demur at thus establishing himself at the Chace, but, in reality, his whole mean pitiful soul gloried in reigning as master there, and he gave himself all the airs of the pride that apes humility. Colonel Walrond might scorn him in his heart, but the colonel's son-in-law must necessarily be of more importance than "that little cad of an attorney" had been. There was no entail; the Squire could leave his property where he list, and, failing a son of his own, who so likely to

succeed as his daughter, Mrs Borrodaile? So folks began to treat the lawyer with considerable respect.

The night Colonel Walrond arrived, Borrodaile, with all the pride of possession, was entertaining several of the leading gentry with a most capital dinner, when the butler whispered to him that the colonel had come.

The lawyer started up, red and confused.

"Your father has come, my dear," he said, looking across the table at his wife.

That young lady took matters with a high hand; she ran out, looking very sweet and pretty in her dainty dinner dress, and threw her arms round her "dear papa."

"And have you brought mamma with you?" she said, gushingly, for she had got over her dislike of Bernice, and had made up her mind to live at the Chace whenever it suited her convenience. Married life had widened Marjorie's knowledge of the world, and Borrodaile had explained to her how difficult it is to live on a limited income, with any degree of satisfaction.

Walrond turned towards Borrodaile, with a look that said plainly, "You have not told your wife, I see," and said so gratefully.

"Go back to your guests, my dear," he said kindly, kissing the soft curls that clustered to her eyebrows. "I will have a fire lit in my study, and you can send me

anything you like in the way of dinner. Later on, Borrodaile, I shall expect you, as I propose leaving again to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XI.

"In shabby state they strut, in tattered robe:
The scene a blanket, and a barn a globe;
No high conceits their moderate wishes raise,
Content with humble profit, humble praise."

THE purse Lady Grace had given Bernice contained twenty sovereigns; this was not much for a delicately nurtured woman to begin life with. On reaching London, she was fortunate in obtaining cheap and respectable lodgings, but the first week's bill, with its innumerable extras, convinced her that

those twenty sovereigns would soon be gone.

She was also obliged to buy various garments, and, sorrowing over the exorbitant prices asked for the commonest articles, she often thought of those handsomely filled imperials that were to have accompanied her on her honeymoon. But there was a novelty and an excitement about this thorough change in her life that, to an ardent-minded young woman like Bernice, could not but prove somewhat exciting. She who till now had always lived in a village, seeing the same faces day after day, knowing the private affairs of her neighbours, from the Misses Flint's meagre housekeeping down to poor old widow Brown's frequent attacks of lumbago,

now found herself surrounded by a perfect sea of mystery, sweeping by her wave after wave of strange faces and obscure life.

One day, while wandering down the Strand, she suddenly found herself face to face with her lost lover, Anthony St Clare. Yes, Anthony St Clare in the flesh, and looking wonderfully hale and handsome, as unlike the *rôle* of ghost he was supposed to play as it was possible for a self-satisfied, well-dressed young Cockney to look.

"Oh, Mr St Clare!" cried Bernice, glad, oh, so glad! to see this ruddy, familiar face in the peopled wilderness of London.

He answered by an astonished exclamation.

"Miss Ghauntly, by all that's wonderful!" and his hearty voice sounded friendly and comforting to Bernice's lonely heart. It was so pleasant to have some sympathetic ear into which to pour her troubles, and Bernice soon told John exactly how she was situated, suppressing nothing but the fact of her having gone through the marriage ceremony with Colonel Walrond. "Why did you leave the country? Why did you come to London?" asked John.

"Oh! I don't know," cried poor Bernice. "I have tried several ways of earning my living and I have failed. Papa gave me a most expensive governess, and yet no one will have me to teach their children — and, and, I was just wondering what I should do — perhaps you can help me

to find work," and she looked up at him.

"Do you want money?" said the young man, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Oh, no, thank you, I have still some money left; but before it is quite gone, I should like to feel I was making some more. Money is a very troublesome thing, is it not, Mr St Clare?" and her lips relaxed into something of their old mobility.

"Money's the very deuce!" cried John; "but I'll tell you what we will do, we will go and talk it over with Bet,—that's my wife—" he stopped, struck with sudden confusion by the memory that the woman to whom he was talking had once been his promised wife; but Bernice's calm face soon reassured him. Our poor girl had

suffered so much since then, that she had almost forgotten their brief, careless engagement.

"Your wife!" she said, with a smile of interest; "are you married then?"

"Yes, and to the best woman that ever lived. She is not exactly a lady, Miss Ghauntly—in fact, if you come to that neither am I a gentleman, for (in a sudden burst of confidence) that story about my being rich was all fudge, you know. I was in reality as poor as a church mouse."

He paused to watch the effect of this confession. Bernice was not as astonished as he expected her to be; personal experience with any deep sorrow makes us wonderfully callous to surprise.

"Have you ever been to the Athenæum?" he continued.

"The Athenæum; where is it, Mr St Clare?"

John gave a little start; to the actor it seems strange when he meets anyone ignorant of *his* theatre; his little world is so public, filling the newspaper, staring at him from every hoarding, crowded nightly by a vast sympathetic multitude!

"It is our theatre, Miss Ghauntly; my wife acts there."

Bernice remembers the shabby little playhouse at Walrond, a poor little expiring theatre which the *élite* had set their face against, and refused to patronise ever since Squire Bulb's son ran away with a dancing girl. She also remembers its

tawdry, faded actresses, and its down-at-heel, seedy-looking actors. Company after company had tried its luck at that poor little house; but they had all borne the same vagabond stamp; and she looks at John in his neat, well-fitting clothes, and mutely wonders.

"This is my house," said Anthony proudly, stopping before a dingy-looking mansion, and taking a latch-key from his pocket; but before he could insert it in the lock the door flew open, and a stylishly-dressed handsome young woman stood laughing in the threshold.

"Bet, my dear," said the young man, "allow me to introduce this young lady, Miss Ghauntly — Madame St Clare," and he gracefully waved his hand.

CHAPTER XII.

"Taking his hand, 'Oh! the strong hand,' she said, 'See! look at mine.'"

COLONEL WALROND had intended stopping one night at the Chace, but listening to Borrodaile's advice, he stayed on for several weeks. The lawyer presumed that, in the event of Walrond's petition for a divorce being successful, he would again go through the marriage ceremony with Bernice. "And on that event taking place," continued this cautious little man, "would it not be

best, my dear sir, for this gossiping little village to know that during the interval between the two ceremonies you and that young lady were separated ? "

Borrodaile, in his anxiety for Bernice's reputation, was actuated by motives of the deepest cunning. He dreaded her taking her place as mistress of the Chace, and he hoped somehow to prevent any real union between this unfortunate pair, and the first step in this scheme seemed gained by keeping the Squire under his own eyes.

Walrond was easily deceived by Borrodaile's sophistry, and he settled down at the Chace with some show of patience, keeping very much in his study, and rarely joining the pleasure parties Marjorie so frequently formed. As for

that young lady, she gave herself great airs, and not being able to wring from Stephen the secret of Bernice's absence, she consoled herself with the hope that her father's wife had somehow quarrelled with him, and kindly meant to leave her, Marjorie, mistress of Walrond Chace.

In the meantime the solicitor to whom Walrond had intrusted his case was not idle; he discovered that the woman who had died in the Liverpool hospital and over whose head a tombstone had been raised, bearing the name of Matilda Carvenue, had been in reality his wife's servant, thus the fact of her wearing clothes marked with Mrs Carvenue's initials was easily explained, presuming that the lady's cast-off garments had been given to her maid. Colonel Wal-

rond ordered Matilda Carvenue to be erased and the woman's real name to be carved on the tomb, but the solicitor advised him to let it remain until the case was decided, as proof that he firmly believed his wife to have been dead.

Borrodaile refused to identify Mrs Hastings as the woman Ralph Walrond had wedded in his youth.

"I never recognised her, my dear colonel; she was romancing when she introduced my name into the affair. I only saw your first wife some half-dozen times, and to the best of my recollection she bore not the slightest resemblance to your late housekeeper."

The Squire had counted on some help from Borrodaile, and his inability to

identify this mysterious woman baffled and disappointed him.

In the midst of this scheming, which, independent of its promise of success, excited and filled the little man's active brain, and was to him a secret source of happiness, an event happened that annoyed him considerably. This was Lord Elmsden's return to the Abbey. The young baron had contrived to cure himself of his once fond love for Marjorie, but still he was not proof against that vain little person's attempts to recapture him; and finding her married to a man he had always despised as "an insufferable little cad," he had no hesitation in commencing a flirtation with the girl he had once hoped to make his wife. He was

not by nature a dishonourable man, but Marjorie herself had taught him contempt for the sex, and all respect and affection for her having died out of his heart, it seemed considerable sport this playing at love with a gay little matron and making her husband madly jealous.

That Borrodaile was jealous every one could see, but he himself fancied that he concealed his real feelings completely, and that by being boisterously civil to Lord Elmsden, he was hiding from that young man his hatred and his suspicion; and so great was the violence he did his feelings, by this concealment, that he was often obliged to shut himself up and gave way to horrible and frenzied paroxysms of rage.

It was the day before Christmas Day, and

Marjorie, aided by several young girls, was decorating the wall with holly and mistletoe, when Lord Elmsden arrived, and laughingly offered his services. Borrodaile happened to be passing, and he knit his brows as Marjorie coquettishly gave the young fellow a large mistletoe bough, telling him to hang it from the centre of the ceiling.

"This cannot last," the lawyer hissed between his teeth, as unnoticed he passed on into Walrond's study, "or I shall take her soft white throat in these two hands, and—" He ended the sentence by a suggestive movement of his long lean fingers, while his usually pallid face grew positively ghastly.

Walrond was sitting listlessly by the

fire, his hand resting on the fine head of an old hound. The dog growled as Borrodaile entered the room, but did not stir from his master's side.

"Well, Borrodaile, any news?" and the Squire turned his head lazily.

"No news of any importance. I am come to speak to you about my own affairs. I have come, as it were, to bid you good-bye."

"Good-bye!" Walrond echoed blankly. Borrodaile had so woven himself into his affairs, and had gained such a thorough ascendency over his honest, vigorous mind that the word good-bye startled and almost pained him.

"Well, you see, my dear Walrond, the fact is this—I am, as you know, an upright man, and I have lived cleanly in this village

for many years; and now I am constantly haunted by one fear, one terror"—he bent forward, and his sinister, ugly face almost touched Ralph—"the fear that your crime may be discovered."

Walrond winced.

"I cannot," continued the other, "face the horrible probability of discovery. I am innocent of any guilt, save the guilt of being accessory to the concealment of the body, and yet I am more worried by remorse than you, the actual murderer."

"Have a care," said Walrond, in a low, harsh voice. "Have a care, Borrodaile, how you use that word. Had I faced inquiry at the time, I am convinced that unlucky affair would not have been called murder."

Shouts of merry laughter reached them from the hall, contrasting strangely with the gloom on these men's faces.

"It is no use our quarrelling over a word, Squire. I cannot stop here; I must make a new home for myself somewhere. Of course it is hard on a man at my time of life," and his voice sunk to a whine. "A professional man, too, has small chance of saving, so I shall have to begin life again as it were."

"Where do you intend going?" asked Ralph.

"That will depend on the help you feel inclined to give me. My wife's money I shall settle on herself; therefore, save a few hundreds that are not worth mentioning, when I resign my

towardship here, I am without means of any kind."

"You wish me to pension you off, I suppose," cried Walrond.

"I wish nothing of the kind," said the other with dignity. "I consider your secret has driven me from here, where I have a modest, but sufficient competency; and, therefore, I am entitled to some aid from you, without mentioning our relationship."

"Name your price?" said Walrond roughly. "I will not stand upon our relationship, I will pay you for keeping my secret."

"Then in that case you relieve me of all false delicacy, and I may tell you that I do not consider forty thousand pounds

in a lump sum too much for all I am resigning."

Walrond started to his feet with an exclamation. "Forty thousand pounds! Impossible! You forget that I shall soon have a young wife; that, please God, I may some day have a little son! I cannot consent to impoverish my fortune thus."

The merry party that had been decorating the hall had gone upstairs to the drawing-room. No one saw a tall, slight girl enter by the open door, and cross swiftly to Walrond's study. The two men stood confronting each other, Borrodaile's little crafty eyes fixed on the Squire's flushed face, when she entered the room.

"Bernice!" and Ralph's face lit up; with two steps he gained her side, and seizing

ner outstretched hands raised them passionately to his lips.

She took a paper from her bosom, and handed it to him; she put her hand through his arm, resting her head upon his shoulder, while he read.

"Your wife, Ralph, evermore your wife," she murmured.

"Read this, Borrodaile," cried the Squire excitedly; "that woman was never my wife—never legally married to me."

Borrodaile took the paper, and his little mean eyes contracted as he read.

"My God!" he cried, "this is the certificate of marriage between Matilda Selvester and Fitz Herman. Where did you get it from?"

"You see by the date, Borrodaile, she

had been married three years when I first met her! Oh! the wretch! Tell me, my darling, how you became possessed of that document."

"Dr Herman prepares pupils for the stage. I was actually thinking of becoming an actress—" and her charming face suddenly flushed and dimpled.

"God forbid!" cried her husband hastily.

"Dr Herman said that I had a good stage appearance, and that with a little rouge I should be divine!—such a kind old man, dear. One day when I went there for my usual lesson in elocution, declamation, etc., I found my master excited with happiness like a schoolboy; his wife had come home from a long professional tour—in that wife, oh! my

darling!" and she threw her arms round his neck in a sudden abandonment and forgetfulness of all save their love and their reunion; "in that wife I recognised Mrs Hastings!"

"And you taxed her with the deception, Bernice?"

"I scarce know what I said, I behaved like a little fury; and that dear, kind old man unlocked his desk and gave me the certificate; he thought I was mistaking his wicked wife for someone else."

"And did you recognise no one else, Miss Bernice," said Borrodaile.

"No; who else was there to recognise?" and the girl for the moment completely forgot Anthony; the lawyer drew a long breath,—

"What an escape!" he murmured. "Allow me to congratulate you, Mrs Walrond," he continued, with an ugly smile. "You have indeed been most fortunate in exposing this adventuress. You remember, colonel, I always said you were the victim of some fraud. And now I will leave you as you have no doubt much to say to one another. If there is anything I can do for you, madam, pray command me," and he bowed gracefully.

"Stay, Borrodaile!" cried Walrond, who seemed to have regained his youth in the pleasurable excitement that filled his being. "Stay; we will consult this dear girl, and if she consents, the forty thousand pounds shall be yours."

"Pray, Squire, reflect," said the lawyer warningly. "You will startle Mrs Walrond if you abruptly disclose your secret."

"There shall be the shadow of no secret between us, Borrodaile. I know you, man, and you shall not come to me with a whine for hush-money to keep this from my wife. She shall hear the bitter story from my own lips, and she shall pardon me or curse me. God knows, I would give my body to any devil-devised torment could I undo that day's work; but God also knows how unpremeditated was the crime. True, I hated that man, but never, no, not in my most bitter anguish, did I wish him dead. It was an accident, a pure accident, and I have been more fool than knave; but if my

wife is willing to pay so largely for your silence, well and good."

"Say, darling," and he took her by either shoulder, "can you listen? Can you bear to look upon me as the God-forsaken wretch upon whom has fallen the curse of Cain?"

"Mrs Walrond," cried Borrodaile, "in pity do not ask him more. Do not take advantage of his present excitement and seek to learn what would plunge you in everlasting grief. I will keep this secret, Squire, ay to my dying day; bind me by any oath you like—"

Bernice never heeded the lawyer's words. With horror that was speechless, she stood trying to read Ralph's very soul.

"You?" she said at last; "you? There

must be some mistake. I can listen; tell me all—all."

"Sit down here, sweetheart, by my side," said Walrond, "and let me tell you while my courage lasts."

A vague distrust of this beautiful Bernice crept over Borrodaile, but he shook it off, muttering to himself, "One can generally trust to a woman's generosity."

"From the first time I saw you, Bernice, I think I must have loved you," said her husband, "but I did not know how fervently until I found you were betrothed to another. Young Mr St Clare seemed then in every way a fitter bridegroom for one so young and fair—"

"But Mr St Clare—" began Bernice, when Walrond interrupted her.

"Stay, my darling, have patience with me; let me tell my story in my own way. Perhaps, child, when I have finished, you will shrink from me in fear and abhorrence."

Bernice took his fevered hand in her cool, soft palms and patted it gently. Said the little hand to the large one, "However stained, see I hold you, and I will never shrink from you." And she listened without interrupting him to this strange, wild tale. Anthony St Clare dead, and by Ralph Walrond's hand! Buried, too, under the old oak that had once, in long-ago days of girlish dalliance, been her favourite seat; that spot hallowed by the tears of penitence and a strong man's agonised appeal to divine mercy; that spot the haunted grave of a murdered man! She started to

her feet, realising in one quick mental flash the serpent craft that had been at work.

"And you buried him, locked in a chest. You never looked upon his dead face. Oh, the villainy of it, the villainy of it!"

Some men passed the window, singing a Christmas carol; they were bringing a splendid Yule-log to the Chace.

"They shall dig up that grave," cried Bernice. "Come with me, you murderers, and look upon your victim's face."

She called to the men—

"There is treasure buried, come and dig for it," and she laughed in wild mirth.

"She is mad!" said Borrodaile. "Good-bye, Squire. I have had enough of this. Why not come with me? we might yet get off—"

But a strange bravado entered Walrond's soul. "Well, let it end so," he thought; "better discovery than years of unavailing remorse. Now that she has turned against me, sacrificing my life even for one look at her dead lover's face."

He neared the grave; another moment and their hands would be about his throat. Nothing but lynch-law would satisfy these sturdy yoemen! They raised the box till it rested on the snow-bound turf, a square coffin torn from its resting-place. One blow and the lid fell back, and then Walrond heard a dull cry of horror, and a hush fell upon the men.

There it lay, a shrouded human form; the folds of the winding-sheet had fallen to the still proportions—the head, the

neck, the massive shoulders—and underneath.

Bernice alone bent over the corpse, and gently drew back the shroud; and it fell, this buried bogey, a *débris* of bricks, of stone, and rags, and rubbish!

CHAPTER XIII.

"There is no friend like woman; in misfortune
Her tenderness consoles us, or her wit
Finds out the only remedy to heal it."

BORRODAILE, surrounded by the wreck of his deep diplomacy, knowing that now discovery was inevitable, hurriedly filled his travelling bag; and after writing a few lines to Marjorie, he left the Chace and walked swiftly towards the railway station.

Marjorie, who was sitting *tête-à-tête* with Lord Elmsden when the servant handed

her the letter, did not even look at it until that young gentleman had taken his departure.

"My dear Madge,—Your stepmother has returned; she orders me out of the house; and I go, intending for the future to cut your people, and leave England. For the present we will take a flat in Paris. Pack at once, and try to catch the five o'clock express. If you go by that train you will arrive in London at the same time as myself, and I will meet you on the platform, Charing Cross Station, and we will cross the Channel to-night.—Yours, Stephen."

Colonel Walrond and his wife walking

slowly home, entered the house just as Marjorie was leaving. She had ordered a carriage to take her to the station, and it was perfectly packed with her luggage.

"Are you going, Marjorie?" said her father. "Stay, dear child, you can no doubt obtain a separation from that wretched man."

But with a haughty look Mrs Borrodaile walked on and entered the carriage.

"To the station," she said; and so she passed away from his life.

. . . . . .

How cosy Walrond's study looked; far away, through the keen air, clear childish voices came to them,

"Peace on earth and good-will towards men."

Ralph drew his wife tenderly to his side; his eyes were dim, and he could not for the moment see the fair face of this helpmate God had given him.

"Bernice," he said, "thy sweet name means *one who bringeth victory!*"

THE END.

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